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Ants and Battlefields, Beetles and Landscapes: Rudiments for a Naturalistic Reading of Ernst Jünger's Interwar Essays through the Lens of His Later Entomological Hermeneutics

Old Testament and New Testament: How to Read Ernst Jünger

It is a widely held belief amongst Ernst Jünger (1895-1998) scholars that his oeuvre can be separated into two distinct phases. Jünger, who is best known for his war memoir *Storms of Steel* (1920) and the allegorical novella *On the Marble Cliffs* (1939), fueled this belief when he wrote: “Zum Opus: meine Bücher über den ersten Weltkrieg, der Arbeiter, die Totale Mobilmachung und zum Teil auch noch der Aufsatz über den Schmerz—das ist mein altes Testament.”¹ (Jünger, *Strahlungen* 166). This statement has been mostly read as an example of Jünger's self-fashioning, the grandeur of an author with an exaggerated opinion of his own importance, as well as an attempt to deemphasize his own nationalistic entanglement with the rise of German fascism. However, despite these critical interpretations, the classification itself is generally taken at face value. Thus the two phases of Jünger's oeuvre have been described as follows: Beginning in 1920 with the self-published first edition of his war memoir *Storms of Steel* and ending in 1934 with the essay “On Pain,” Jünger's early writings are considered to be “dangerous and moreover esoteric” (Bohrer 13). Yet most of his readers deem these texts his main contribution to literary modernity, ranging from surrealistic vignettes to expressionistic experiments to exemplary descriptions in the style of New Objectivity. In terms of content, Jünger's early texts are mainly concerned with the impact modern technology and World War I have had and will have on modern life.

Following this classification, Jünger's late work would consist of everything he wrote between 1935 and his death in 1998, spanning sixty-eight years. Considering the fact that this second phase is significantly longer—though sometimes further divided into a period beginning with the National Socialistic rule and ending with the entire post-war era—it is astounding

¹ “Concerning the opus: my books on World War I, *The Worker*, ‘The Total Mobilization’ and partly my essay ‘On Pain’—this is my Old Testament.” If not indicated otherwise, the translations in this chapter are my own.

that this vast body of political, philosophical, and ethical essays; his literary diaries; as well as his fantasy, crime, and science-fiction novels, has gained so little attention in contrast to the first fourteen years of his early literary career. One possible explanation for the lack of interest in Jünger's post-war writings could be that his literary style grew "ever more old-fashioned, ever more occupied with itself" (6) and thus did not appeal to contemporary readers after 1945, as Matthias Schöning and Ingo Stöckmann suggest. However, another explanation for the strong division of early and late work can be found when looking at the content of these writings. While in his early career, Jünger mainly examined the relationship of pre- and inter-war modernity, as well as the rise of technology as an autonomous force, his later writings became increasingly occupied with a seemingly heterogeneous subject: nature.

This rough periodization, and to some extent even the stylistic assertions usually colligated with it, does hold some merit when it comes to providing a historical, political, or literary background. Still, when connected to, or even derived from, poetological self-statements such as the one above, it becomes obvious that periodization has its limits when engaging with Jünger's epistemological deliberations on a theoretical level. This is mainly because such a periodization tends to omit one crucial trait of his literary strategy: the immense importance of context. Taking a closer look at the journal entry Jünger's proposition stems from, it will become clear that rather than providing evidence for a strong division of distinct phases in his oeuvre, the original context actually points toward an argument for a consistent, yet evolving, line of thought as well as a unified methodic approach to the description and analysis of pre-, inter-, and post-war reality.

September 16, 1942:

Contextualization and the Descriptive-Reflexive Method

Jünger's method, which can be ascertained throughout the entirety of his oeuvre, can be identified as a literary reinstatement of epistemological premises in the vein of classical natural history. "What keeps natural history together as a scientific field," Staffan Müller-Wille states, is less a distinctly delimited subject area than a certain epistemic attitude which does not primarily aim at quantification and measurement, as well as experiment and evidence, but, rather, at collecting, organizing and passing on what is observed and reported. (1176)

As Tanja van Hoorn has demonstrated in her recent study on the relevance of natural history in modern literature, "Jünger's oeuvre ... bears witness to the familiarity of its author with the field of classical natural history" (253). Although van Hoorn's study examines only two texts from what is considered to be the later period of the oeuvre, namely his novel *On the Marble Cliffs* (1939) and the entomological diary *Subtile Jagden* ("Subtle Hunts") of 1967, her findings can be used as a starting point for a thorough re-examination of the importance of natural history in Jünger's works. Bearing this in mind, Stöckmann's paper, titled "Jüngers Spätwerk" ("Jünger's Late Works"), which is one of the first comprehensive, as well as methodically underpinned, attempts to challenge the notion of a definite periodization of Jünger's oeuvre, can be read as further proof for an overarching epistemic approach running through Jünger's entire work. Stöckmann writes:

Fast alles, was Jünger an Diagnosen ersonnen hat, verdankt sich derselben generativen Struktur: Auf einer imaginären Oberfläche bloßer Erscheinungen, die im "Blick" des Autors den Status von bedeutenden Zeichen gewinnen, ordnen die Texte Phänomene an, die aufgrund ihrer Heterogenität zunächst disparat bleiben, in einem zweiten Schritt aber tiefensemantisch integriert werden. Was auf der Oberfläche der Zeiterscheinungen als Syntagma zusammenhangloser Zeichen auftritt, erweist sich in der "Tiefe" als deren verschwiegene, aber zum Ausdruck drängende Bedeutungsuniversale. Autorschaft ist hier kaum mehr, als das Zur-Verfügung-Halten eines Wahrnehmungsschemas und seiner generativen Prozeduren....² (45)

Laying aside the doubts Stöckmann raises concerning the applicability of Jünger's method by putting scare quotes on visual metaphors such as "vantage point" ("Blick") or "deeper level" ("Tiefe"), what he calls a "generative pattern" can be described in terms of natural history, namely as a literary implementation of "collecting, organizing and passing on." This claim can be backed up by the fact that animals (metaphorical and actual), as well as the environments (landscapes, collections, or battlefields) these animals are

² "Almost every diagnosis conceived by Jünger owes itself to the same generative pattern: On an imaginary level of mere appearances, attaining the rank of signs discernible from the 'vantage point' of the author, these texts arrange phenomena, which remain disparate at first due to their heterogeneous nature; nonetheless, in a second step, they are integrated into the text on a deeper semantic level. On the surface of temporary phenomena, it appears to be a collection of disjointed signs, yet on a 'deeper level,' an indiscernible universal meaning strives to be expressed. Authorship in this sense seems to be nothing more than the willingness to make available a mode of perception as well as its generative patterns...."

situated in, can be found in every major text Jünger has written. Consequently, to understand Jünger as a thinker with a distinct methodic approach is to read him as an author deeply concerned with zoopoetic and eco-poetic concerns.

Two major contexts support the notion that rather than being an “emphatic appeal for interpretation” (Martus 132), indulgent or otherwise, Jünger’s proposition of a biblical subdivision of his oeuvre may indeed be read as an unexpectedly precise instruction for understanding the epistemological significance he ascribed to his early writings. The first significant context is time. The journal entry which includes the proposition was written during World War II, on September 16, 1942, a time when Jünger served as an officer in occupied Paris and was mainly entrusted with administrative and documentary work. On November 13, 1941, in one of the most famous journal entries from his first deployment in Paris, between April 1941 and October 1942, he recounts some details of one of the regular informal gatherings he used to have with Hans Speidel, chief of staff to the military commander in France, and other high ranking officers who felt alienated by Hitler’s occupation politics. Jünger’s characterization of this group, which is tellingly written against the backdrop of one of the oldest animal metaphors of recorded human history, namely the biblical myth of the leviathan, gives a good impression of what kind of impact the war had on him, even though he did not fire a single shot during the entire campaign and rarely visited the front lines:

Unter seiner [Speidels] Aegide bildeten wir hier im Inneren der Militärmaschine eine Art von Farbzelle, von geistiger Ritterschaft; wir tagen im Bauch des Leviathans und suchen noch den Blick, das Herz zu wahren für die Schwachen und Schutzlosen.³ (Jünger, *Strahlungen* 64)

Instead of being the immediate, material, and corporeal experience it had been for Jünger in World War I, war had become a backdrop, an elusive yet haunting atmosphere that had to be taken into perspective time and again.

The second context is setting: the particular environment in which the statement is conceived, as well as the immediate textual surroundings of the journal entry of which the periodization is part. “Mittwochnachmittag wie gewöhnlich im Bois,” Jünger notes at the beginning of the entry, “doch

³ “Unter seiner [Speidels] Aegide bildeten wir hier im Inneren der Militärmaschine eine Art von Farbzelle, von geistiger Ritterschaft; wir tagen im Bauch des Leviathans und suchen noch den Blick, das Herz zu wahren für die Schwachen und Schutzlosen.”

diesmal nicht in La Bagatelle, sondern im Jardin d'Acclimatation."⁴ (Jünger, *Strahlungen* 164). Conceptualized and for a short time directed by Isidore Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, son of the renowned naturalist Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, the *jardin zoologique d'acclimatation*, as it was then called, opened its gates to the public as a supplementary zoo for Paris in 1860, at the height of bourgeois demand for naturalistic experiences. By the time Jünger was visiting the zoo during the occupation of the city, the *jardin* had become a family-oriented leisure park. However, a collection of farm animals as well as some exotic birds were still on display. At first, Jünger seems to have noticed a couple of Sumatra chickens, "schwarz, mit tiefgrünem Schimmer, der sich im Sonnenglanze herrlich offenbart."⁵ (Jünger, *Strahlungen* 164) He then goes on to compare the lustrous tail feathers of the Sumatra cock to the less conspicuous ones of the common domestic cock, which brings him to the conclusion that differences, especially small ones, are the main mode of expression in nature:

Hierin liegt auch der Reiz der Sammlung, nicht etwa in der Lückenlosigkeit. Es handelt sich darum, in der Vielfalt Aussichtspunkte zu gewinnen, die um das unsichtbare Zentrum der schöpferischen Energie geordnet sind. Das ist zugleich der Sinn der Gärten und der Sinn des Lebensweges überhaupt.⁶ (Jünger, *Strahlungen* 165)

These two quotes are a characteristic example of Jünger's literary process as a whole: He starts out by drawing up a very specific, very aesthetic description of something, in this case the plumage of the Sumatra chickens. He then moves on to an even more specific detail, "the elementary quantum of aesthetics" (24) as Hans Blumenberg calls it. This detail, namely the tail feathers of the Sumatra cock, serves as the starting point for a more general reflection on the sphere it is derived from, in this case "the allure of collecting." Finally, Jünger ends by making a sudden conjunction to another seemingly distinguished sphere: "life's journey" can be seen as a form of collection which is somewhat similar to the naturalistic collection of a zoological garden. It should be added that this ostensibly incidental mentioning of "life's

⁴ "Wednesday afternoon at the Bois as usual, however, this time not at *La Bagatelle* but at the *jardin d'acclimatation*."

⁵ "[B]lack, with deep green sheen, gorgeously revealed by the plenteous glitter of the sun."

⁶ "Herein lies the allure of collecting, it is not about completeness. It is about attaining some vantage points amidst the richness of all that is arranged around the indiscernible center of creative energy. This is the point of the garden and it is the point of life's journey in general."

journey” is indeed very carefully arranged with regard to the inference at the end of the journal entry.

Two more instances of initiating this descriptive-reflective script can be identified in this particular journal entry. After the scene with the Sumatra chickens, Jünger goes on to describe a small pond near the *Pavillon d'Armenoville*:

Die weichen Flossenschläge von Fischen oder der Fall von einer reifen Kastanie zog über seine [des Teiches] Fläche feine Wellenkreise, die sich schnitten und so ein zartes Gitter schufen, in dem sich herrlich das Grün der Bäume fing. Sein Netzwerk schien sich an den Borden zu verfeinern, so daß die Blätter einer großen Katalpe in der Mitte in Kreisen und Ovalen blänkerten, um dann am Ufer in grüne Bänder zu verschmelzen, die zitternd gleich Fahnen in die Tiefe eintauchten.⁷ (Jünger, *Strahlungen* 165)

What Jünger depicts in this scene is considerably more complex than his description of the Sumatra cock. Fish, chestnuts, the catalpa, as well as the pond itself, are bound by a sophisticated framework of relations that is made visible by the different undulations on the surface of the pond and perceived only by Jünger himself. While this scene certainly has aesthetic value, it seems also to imply a significance exceeding the basic idea of all-connectedness in nature. Yet in itself, the scene does not provide the means to decipher the deeper meaning it is hinting at. Jünger goes on to reveal that what he has just described can be read as a metaphor for the process through which anything new emerges in the world:

Gedanke: so müßte man die neuen Töne bringen, didaktisch, im Spiegelbilde, das dem vertrauten Bilde angeheftet ist.... Das Neue wirkt immer so, daß es zunächst ans Gültige sich anfügt, als zarter Widerspruch, als Schatten der Möglichkeit.... Das Neue siedelt erst lange in Reflexionen und an fabulösen Rändern....⁸ (165-166)

⁷ “The soft flaps of fish fins or the plunge of a ripe chestnut unfurled soft undulations on its [the ponds] surface, intersecting and thus creating a delicate grid, in which the green of the trees was gorgeously ensnared. This meshwork seemed to refine itself on the banks, with the result that the leaves of a large catalpa at the center started to skirmish in circles and ovals, only to coalesce to green ribbons, which plunged into the depth, quivering like flags.”

⁸ “Thought: This is how one would have to reveal the new sounds, didactical, in a mirror image which is attached to the familiar image.... The new always exerts by attaching itself to what is available, a soft dissent, a shadow of contingency. After that it starts to permeate objects.... The new settles in reflections and fabulous margins for a long time.”

He then continues to illustrate this idea by giving brief explanations of how this process can be traced in the history of art, games, utopias, philosophy, and theory. What is, however, crucial about this theory of the new, especially with regard to the context, is the notion that it can be understood as the complementary component to his idea of the collection as a means to gain “vantage points” among the vast richness of nature.

Looking at the journal entry of September 16, 1942 as a whole, it becomes clear that there is indeed nothing coincidental about this text, that it is, on the contrary, a carefully crafted literary “exercise in seeing” (7), as Sandro Gorgone puts it. This particular exercise, dated September 16, can be subdivided into three distinct instances of Jünger’s descriptive-reflective script, which in combination form a complex argument. The first instance is guided by the description of the Sumatra chicken, then leads to the theory that the coherence of a collection is ensured by the juxtaposition of differences and similarities, and concludes by adding “life’s journey” (Jünger, *Strahlungen* 165) to this notion. While the first instance focuses on an animal, the second goes on to describe a complex environmental network located in and around a pond. Here Jünger augments his initial concept by adding the encroaching and permeating effect of the new. He finally goes on to initiate the last instance of his descriptive-reflexive script by adding another animal at the fringes of the pond:

Nicht zu vergessen: die beiden Eisvögel, die hier am Rande der Großstadt über Polstern von Wasserlinsen dahinschwirren. Sie nisten in dem kleinen Zufluß, der das Teichlein speist. Von allen Wendungen dieses juwelenhaften Tieres finde ich die am schönsten, in der es das Schwanzgefieder zeigt—der lasurblaue Rücken blitzt dort pulvrig wie Türkisstaub auf.⁹ (166)

As with the Sumatra cock, the aesthetic experience derived from a particular animal seems to be at the core of this description. However, this time, Jünger specifies the environment the animal is situated in, thus contextualizing this aesthetic experience in two important ways: On the one hand, he mentions that the whole scene takes place “on the outskirts of the big city,” i.e., occupied Paris, and on the other hand, he explains that the kingfishers nest at the edge of the pond, namely its inlet. This double enclosure complicates the

⁹ “Not to forget: the two kingfishers whirring above pads of duckweed at the outskirts of the big city. They nest in the small inlet which supplies the little pond. Of all the expressions of this jewel-like animal, the one I find most beautiful is when it shows its tail feathering—then the translucent-blue back flashes powdery like turquoise dust.”

epistemic constellation unfolding throughout all of the journal entry even further. Occupied Paris, “the belly of the leviathan” (64), may be a relatively safe place compared to other parts of Europe during World War II, but this safety is fragile, temporary, and only possible due to the transient military superiority of the German Wehrmacht. Accordingly, the small pond on the outskirts of Paris is also a relatively safe place, but this safety is even more fragile and temporary. Jünger hints at this precarious situation by stressing that the kingfishers nest on the edge of the pond just like the occupied city is “nesting” on the edge of the park. Considering the separate addition of the kingfishers to the scene at the pond, their “fringe” position between the occupied city and the pond, as well as the physical effects their “whirring” must have on the pond’s relatively calm surface, it becomes clear that the whole carefully crafted epistemic construction, the meshwork of undulations, has to be modified. With this, Jünger illustrates the corrective effect of the new. However gentle the encroaching of the new might seem, it is still an agent of change. In short: Every collection, every “vantage point” is transient.

With all this in mind, it becomes comprehensible why Jünger chooses the tradition of biblical exegesis, the practice of re-reading and re-contextualizing, for his self-classification as a reflective companion piece to his description of the kingfishers at the edge of the pond. Once it is established that “life’s journey,” and therefore Jünger’s literary career, too, can be described as a naturalistic collection which is held together by a delicate meshwork of differences and similarities and which is, at the same time, constantly facing the necessity of reevaluation due to the introduction of the new, it becomes clear that Jünger’s proposition for a biblical reading of his early texts is not an act of self-preservation; it is an admission that these texts are deeply compromised by the current events of the time, namely World War II and fascist politics in general. The pond, as Jünger describes it, is an immersive and self-contained system of signs and references. Likewise, his interwar essays on war, pain, and technology are structured by a set of ideas and beliefs which have to be called into question once he is forced by current events to widen his perspective on these subjects and the line of thought they bring about. By contextualizing this admission the way he does, he provides the means to preserve certain aspects of his insights on technology, which, as he suggests, hold true despite the political climate in which they were conceived. What presents itself as an apotheosis of a few texts on technology turns out to be an allusion to the medieval tradition of biblical exegesis: Jünger’s proposition amounts to invoking natural history as the common denominator of his entire oeuvre, thereby laying the foundation for a her-

meneutical re-reading of his early texts, suggesting that they may be read in the same manner as Christian biblical scholars have read the Old Testament. “Hermeneutics is normally defined as signifying the systematic methods and practices of explication, of the interpretative exposition of texts, in particular (or particularly) scriptural and classical” (Steiner 7). From the perspective of literary studies, this type of diachronic reading leads to an inversion of the usual interpretative scheme, prioritizing Jünger’s later naturalistic texts and using the insights derived from these studies “to make the refractory text[s] speak to the present moment and the issue at hand” (Burns 321).

In the following, I will first give a brief overview of what I call Jünger’s entomological hermeneutics—a theory he develops during the 1960s—and then move on to give an impression of how this theory could be used to provide an aesthetic perspective on the epistemological implications of his interwar essays.

Beetles and Landscapes: Jünger’s Entomological Hermeneutics

Literary descriptions of various beetles as well as some remarks on collecting natural objects can be found as early as 1924 in the third edition of *Storms of Steel*. Yet Jünger only approaches this subject in a somewhat systematic manner forty years later: In 1963, he publishes a treatise entitled “Typus, Name, Gestalt” (“Type, Name, Gestalt”), to which he refers as the result of his ongoing preoccupation with “zoology, entomology in particular, the universals controversy, Far Eastern religion” (Archival, 2.4.1963) in a letter to the publisher Hans Walter Bär. Two years later, in 1965, he gives a speech in front of the society of Bavarian entomologists entitled *Researchers and Enthusiasts* and publishes the essay *Bordercrossings*. In both these texts, Jünger compares and contrasts aesthetic and scientific descriptions of nature, as well as exploring their respective benefits and responsibilities. Finally, in 1967, he recounts his own entomological biography in the diaristic essay “Subtile Jagden” (“Subtle Hunts”). According to Gunther Martens, Jünger’s beetle hunts can be described as a “phenomenological world experience, characterized by conflation and participation, which are more reminiscent of hermeneutics than positivism” (154). The basic principles of these “entomological hermeneutics” can be delineated in three steps: affection, differentiation, and responsibility.

1. Every decision to start a naturalistic collection is preceded by a basic affection for a noticeable representative specimen. In “Subtile Jagden” this

noticeable representative is a tiger beetle, which Jünger encounters at the age of twelve in a sandpit near his house:

Wie gesagt, währte die Begegnung nur einen Augenblick, allein der Funke zündete. Ebenso überraschend, wie das Inbild erschienen war, verschwand es; in beiden Bewegungen verbanden sich Leichtigkeit und Kraft: zunächst ein Davonschießen auf ebener Erde, fast unsichtbar schwebend, und dann mit einer zarten Explosion von bunten Metallen die Ablösung.¹⁰ (*Essays IV* 69)

This encounter can indeed be called an “ignition spark” for two reasons: On the one hand, this *kairos*-experience can be read as the literal sparking of affection, on the other hand—read in combination with the oxymoron “tender explosion” at the end—it points to the indeterminability of this first encounter. What Jünger delineates, using the example of the tiger beetle, can be compared to what Hans-Georg Gadamer has called “the stimulus” in his essay “On the Circle of Understanding” (1959): “For whatever entices us to understand has first to have made itself prominent in its otherness. The first thing with which understanding begins is that something speaks to us. That is the supreme hermeneutical requirement.” (77)

2. Once a certain interest has emerged, what follows is a differentiation in the structure of the collection on the basis of the collectibles themselves. On the one hand, these collectibles are irreducible due to their “distanced objectivism” (“Circle” 76), on the other hand, they all point to the basic theme of the collection. This is where Jünger’s concept of the type, which is directly derived from his entomological practice, comes into play. In “Type, Name, Gestalt” he writes:

Wenn wir ein bestimmtes Tier, etwa ein Insekt, als “Scarabaeus” ansprechen, so ging dem die Begegnung mit einem vergänglichen Individuum voraus. Wir setzen und benennen es als Typus: Der Name umgrenzt nunmehr ein Fach, in dem wir alle anderen Individuen dieser Art mühelos unterbringen, mögen sie uns nun in der Natur begegnen oder nicht, ja mögen sie auch nur gedacht werden. Legionen passen hinein. Der Typus ist das Vorbild, an dem wir Maß nehmen.¹¹ (*Essays VII* 99)

¹⁰ “As I said, this encounter only lasted for an instant; alas a spark ignited. As surprisingly as this epitome appeared it vanished; both of these motions were inhabited by levity and vigor: at first a darting-off on plane soil, almost invisibly floating, and then a tender explosion of multicolored metals: lift-off.”

¹¹ “If we call a certain animal, for instance, an insect, ‘Scarabaeus’, this was preceded by an encounter with an ephemeral individual. We position and denominate it as a type: henceforth this name delineates a compartment in which we can effortlessly accommodate every

Type as an entomological concept amounts to what Julia Draganović calls the paradox phenomenon of a “substantial idea” (23-26) in Jünger’s writing, because it is on the one hand a material object and on the other hand a “pattern” by which other objects of its kind can be described. Jünger stresses the decision-based character of this process: The insect collector has to “position and denominate” in order to transform the “ephemeral individual” into an entomological type. Once this operation is successful the mounted beetle can offer insight into different taxonomic ranks. According to Jünger, however, these idealized “compartments” are more than mere arrangements of taxonomical markers. Considered from the right angle, they might give some indication of the entity which generated these markers: “In dieser Folge hat sich die wirkende Natur, als ob sie immer stärkere Wellen ausgesendet hätte, dem Auge offenbart. Der Mensch hat ihr im gleichen Verhältnis mit der unterscheidenden und diagnostischen Schärfe, zunächst des Blickes und sodann der Sprache, geantwortet.”¹² (*Essays VII* 99) For Jünger, the “agency of nature” (more traditional: *natura naturans*) is the source of every phenomenon. Through what Jünger describes as the act of typologization, man can create “vantage points” (“Aussichtspunkte”; *Strahlungen* 165), which can be used to trace nature’s signal by ascending the taxonomical ranks, thereby approaching, yet never reaching, its source.

3. As an ongoing hermeneutic occupation, collecting draws its legitimacy from respect for its subject matter. Therefore, in a moral sense hermeneutics can be described as “the enactment of answerable understanding, of active understanding” (Steiner 7). For Jünger this responsibility is exemplified in the relationship of man with the environment from which the beetles stem and by which they are formed. A common example of these environmental characteristics is camouflage, which render the animals almost invisible in certain aspects of their natural surroundings. In zoology this process of becoming invisible is called *somatolysis* (i.e., the dissolution of the body). Jünger reverses this process in his environmental readings by looking at certain details of the beetles in his collection and thereby reconstructing the specific locations in which they would have been rendered invisible. In “Subtile Jagden” he summarizes:

other individual of this kind, whether or not we encounter them in nature, whether or not they actually exist. Legions fit in. The type is the pattern by which we take measure.”

¹² “In this succession the agency of nature revealed itself to the eye, as if it had sent off increasingly stronger waves. Man has answered this call in proportion with a distinguishing and diagnostic sharpness, at first by looking, then by speaking.”

Es gibt ein Schriftbild der Natur, das in der Betrachtung seiner feinsten Züge geübte Auge erkennt in ihnen die Charaktere eines Weltteils, einer Insel, einer Alpenkette, so wie der Kundige die Eigenart des Menschen aus seiner Handschrift zu deuten weiß.¹³ (*Essays* VI 31-32)

Jünger's art of reading the beetles can be described as an entomological fusion of horizons, a literary staging of what Gadamer calls "the experience of a tension between the text and the present" (*Truth* 305): On the one hand the "most subtle features" of the beetles can be understood as very specific characters that form a prehistoric text, bearing witness to evolutionary and geological processes spanning millions of years, on the other hand this look at ancient times puts the issues of modern times into perspective. Hermeneutics, the art of construing and understanding meaning, is thus expanded to everything that comes into being.

Ants and Battlefields: A Taxonomy of Technological Modernism

I want to conclude this brief outline of Jünger's entomological hermeneutics with an even briefer glance at the underlying naturalistic structure of his interwar essays. On February 10, 1916, under the impression of early attrition warfare, Ernst Jünger writes a letter to his younger brother Friedrich Georg including the following line: "Vielleicht leben auch wir hier in unseren Bauten instinktiver als wir ahnen, etwa wie die Ameisen"¹⁴ (*Feldpostbriefe* 75). It is telling that Jünger articulates one of the earliest accounts of his life during World War I by comparing infantrymen like himself to ants; moreover, his statement encapsulates what will in his later texts become the basic relation of animal and environment, situating it in a technological context: "[D]ie Landschaft des Schlachtfeldes [ist] keine Naturlandschaft, sondern eine technische"¹⁵ (*Pöblische Publizistik* 234). To survive in this hostile environment of constant artillery fire, the infantrymen have no choice but to create somewhat safer niches, namely makeshift dugouts or "Bauten" as Jünger writes in his letter. From Jünger's perspective these circumstances transform the soldiers into ant-like creatures: "Da hockten sie im Engen, verwogene

¹³ "There is a type face in nature; to an eye, which is trained in looking at nature's most subtle features, the characteristics of certain parts of the world, certain islands, certain chains of the Alps become as discernible as an individual becomes to someone who is trained to construe the idiosyncrasies of a person by looking at his or her handwriting."

¹⁴ "Maybe we do live more viscerally here in our constructions, perhaps like ants."

¹⁵ "[T]he landscape of the battlefield is not a natural one, it is a technical landscape."

Brut, verwittert und zerschissen, mit Gesichtern wie geschliffene Klinge....”¹⁶
(*Essays I* 58)

These deliberations about a convergence of human and animal in the image of the ant can be read as early rudiments of Jünger’s natural historical-typological re-conception of man, which is primed in his war memoirs, biologically underpinned in his articles on military theory from 1923 onwards, and fully realized in his essay *The Worker* (1932). The emergence of technology as a driving force of modernity, he argues in this major work of the interwar period, has put the whole world in a precarious state akin to the battlefields of World War I:

Augenfällig wird dieses provisorische Verhältnis an dem wirren, unaufgeräumten Zustande, der seit über hundert Jahren zum Kennzeichen der technischen Landschaft gehört. Dieser das Auge verletzende Anblick wird nicht nur durch die Zerstörung der Natur- und Kulturlandschaft hervorgerufen—er erklärt sich durch den unvollkommenen Zustand der Technik selbst. Diese Städte mit ihren Drähten und Dämpfen, mit ihrem Lärm und Staub, mit ihrem ameisenhaften Durcheinander, mit ihrem Gewirr von Architekturen und ihren Neuerungen, die ihnen alle zehn Jahre ein neues Gesicht verleihen, sind gigantische Werkstätten der Formen—sie selbst aber besitzen keine Form.¹⁷ (177)

As with his later entomological hermeneutics, the basic relationship here is that between an environmentally framed productive agent, i.e., “workshops of form,” and a species which is formed by it, in this case the ant-like worker. If Jünger’s war memoirs are to be considered as an effort to identify a war-bred, ant-like species of man, based on the model of natural history, then his interwar essays can be read as components of the large-scale reconstruction of the natural system that this military-myrmecological species might be situated in.

To conclude: There remains a structural difference between ants and beetles, as well as between battlefields and landscapes. However, these differences are not differences in kind. The denoted entities as well as their

¹⁶ “There they hunker in density, reckless brood, weathered and raddled, with faces like sharpened blades....”

¹⁷ “This tentative condition becomes palpable due to the chaotic, untidy state which has been a notable feature of the technical landscape for over a hundred years. This eyesore is not caused by the destruction of the natural and cultural landscape alone; it can be explained by the imperfect state of technology itself. These cities with their wires and fume, with their noise and dust, with their ant-like clutter, with their tangle of architectures and innovations, which give them a new face every ten years, are gigantic workshops of form, yet they do not hold a form themselves.”

respective relationships can be meaningfully compared with each other through the lens of natural history. This comparability of carefully crafted zoopoetic as well as ecopoetic motifs could subsequently serve as an entry point for a comprehensive re-reading of Jünger's oeuvre, which, on the one hand, would bridge the ostensibly substantial gap between his early and his later works, while, on the other hand, leaving contradictions, contexts, and self-corrections intact.

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